VNCA
VOC. FOR IOP/FN
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PROTECTING ANTARCTICA

ANNCR:

THE APPROACH OF WINTER IN ANTARCTICA FINDS THIRTEEN NATIONS IN TENTATIVE AGREEMENT ON PROTECTING ANTARCTICA'S MAJOR OCEANIC FOOD RESOURCE. VOA'S LARRY LESUEUR HAS DETAILS IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

A CONVENTION WHICH MIGHT BECOME A LANDMARK IN INTERNATIONAL LAW HAS BEEN DRAFTED AT A THIRTEEN NATION CONFERENCE IN CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA. THE DRAFT CONVENTION, EXPECTED TO TAKE FINAL FORM BEFORE THE YEAR IS OUT, WOULD BE THE FIRST TO PROTECT A LIVING MARINE RESOURCE BEFORE IT UNDERGOES LARGE-SCALE EXPLOITATION, THE ANTARCTIC CONVENTION WOULD REGULATE THE TAKING OF A SHRIMP-LIKE CREATURE CALLED THE KRILL, A TINY CRUSTACEAN THAT ABOUNDS IN ANTARCTIC WATERS.

THE KRILL IS A FOOD SUPPLY FOR A WIDE RANGE OF LIVING THINGS FROM THE HUGE BLUE WHALES TO PENGUINS AS WELL AS SEALS, FISH AND SQUID. BUT KRILL COULD ALSO PROVIDE A VALUABLE SOURCE OF ANIMAL FEED AS WELL A STAPLE IN THE HUMAN DIET. THE DRAFT CONVENTION PROVIDES FOR A COMMISSION REPRESENTING ALL CONVENTION ADHERENTS TO SET ANNUAL CATCH QUOTAS WITH INSPECTORS TO OBSERVE COMPLIANCE. AN INDEPENDENT COUNCIL OF EXPERTS WOULD ASSESS THE EFFECTS OF KRILL HARVESTING, BEARING IN MIND THAT THE ECOLOGY OF ANTARCTICA DEPENDS HEAVILY ON THE KRILL POPULATION.

JAPAN AND THE SOVIET UNION HAVE BEEN ACTIVELY HARVESTING KRILL, AND IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, SEVERAL OTHER NATIONS HAVE BEGUN FISHING IN ANTARCTIC WATERS, ALTHOUGH STILL ON A MODERATE SCALE. IN THE SOVIET UNION, THE TINY CRUSTACEANS ARE MADE INTO A SANDWICH SPREAD KNOWN AS SHRIMP BUTTER.

THE SIGNING OF A FORMAL CONVENTION ON KRILL FISHING COULD SET THE STAGE FOR AN AGREEMENT ON A REGIME TO EXPLOIT ANTARCTIC MINERAL RESOURCES, INCLUDING OFFSHORE OIL PROSPECTING. THE UNITED STATES, AS HOST GOVERNMENT FOR THE NEXT ANTARCTIC TREATY CONSULTATIVE SESSION PLANS TO CONVENE A PRELIMINARY MEETING TO CONSIDER THE LEGAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS OF ANTARCTICA'S MINERAL RESOURCES. RECOMMENDATIONS COMING OUT OF THAT MEETING WILL BE PRESENTED TO THE TENTH CONSULATIVE MEETING OF THE ANTARCTIC TREATY NATIONS SET FOR SEPTEMBER 1979 IN WASHINGTON.

THE UNITED STATES, IT IS UNDERSTOOD, WOULD PREFER TO REACH AGREEMENT, IF POSSIBLE, ON THE LIVING RESOURCES CONVENTION, BEFORE ATTEMPTING TO RESOLVE THE ISSUES TIED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTARCTIC MINERAL RESOURCES.

JS/RCS